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TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER PK

SUBJECT: PASHTUN POLITICAL LEADER KILLED IN KARACHI

Classified By: Kay Anske, Consul General, reasons 1.4(b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On February 6, gunmen killed the Sindh Deputy President of the Awami National Party (ANP), Fazlur Rehman Akakhel. Almost immediately after, Pashtuns in Karachi took to the streets, creating mayhem in certain neighborhoods and traffic jams everywhere. In a separate incident, the Karachi President of the Punjab-Pakhtun Ittehad Party (PPI) was shot and killed the same day. The police responded quickly to quell the violence. Pashtuns, (aka Pathan) long-time political rivals Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) are assumed to be the killers. There is no evidence that Al Qaeda or the Taliban are involved. The closer we get to elections on February 18, we expect to see more Pashtun-MQM rivalry in Karachi and Sindh. End summary.

¶2. (C) In the late afternoon of Wednesday, February 6, gunmen killed the Deputy President for the Awami National Party (ANP) in Sindh, Fazlur Rehman Akakhel. The ANP is the party for Pashtuns, of whom there are more than 2 million in Karachi, making this the largest Pashtun community outside of Peshawar.

¶3. (C) Akakhel was in his vehicle in the Sohrab Goth (Pashtun dominated) area of Karachi when a gunman on a motorcycle rode by and shot Akakhel dead. As soon as the word spread of Akakhel's murder, stores began to close. The result was traffic jams and gridlock in many parts of the city, even those that saw no violence.

¶4. (C) Violence did indeed flare in those Karachi neighborhoods with large Pashtun populations. It included aerial firing of weapons, and some vehicles and motorcycles were stoned or burned. In one shooting incident, three persons were shot by a mob; two of them later died.

¶5. (C) Unlike in December after Bhutto's death, the police responded quickly to quell the violence and reportedly used tear gas on the mobs to make them disperse. As a result, the violence was much less than it could have been.

¶6. (C) In a separate incident, at almost the same time, Zakir Khan, Karachi President of the Punjab-Pakhtun Ittehad Party (PPI), was shot and killed in Baldia Town (in the west part of the city). The method was similar ) men on motorcycles.

¶7. (C) Earlier on Wednesday, in an unrelated meeting, the Nazim (Mayor) of Karachi told the Consul General that Pashtuns and other tribal groups from the northern areas of Pakistan were moving in large numbers to Karachi. He claimed these people have stashed arms and ammunition in the city, and had put MQM leaders and workers on a hit list. According to the Nazim, the Pashtuns had already submitted a request to their religious leaders for a fatwa against the MQM. As soon as the fatwa is given, the Pashtuns would start killing MQM leaders. The rumor mill in Karachi is also saying that the

MQM has advised its workers to have a week's supply of food and weapons and ammunition (for protection purposes) in case of violence before, during and after the election.

¶ 18. (C) Comment: The economically powerfully Pashtun community in Karachi and the politically powerful MQM have been feuding in Karachi since the 1980s. The MQM have managed to keep the ANP \* indeed any Pashtun \* out of political office in Karachi and Sindh despite the Pashtuns significant population in Karachi. Many observers believe that these latest killings were the work of MQM, a reminder to the ANP of who is in charge of politics in Sindh.

¶ 19. (C) Comment continued: At the same time, the MQM are very aware that the Pashtuns control virtually all means of transport in Karachi and can easily block the main routes in and out of the city. The Nazim's comments to the Consul General \* no matter how far-fetched they may seem - reflect the level of hostility between the two groups, particularly leading up to the February 18 elections. End comment.

ANSKE